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SUBJ: KAZAKHSTAN A WORTHY STRATEGIC PARTNER - MEDIA COVERAGE ON
NAZARBAYEV VISIT

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¶1. SUMMARY: Reporting by mostly pro-government and official Kazakhstani media on President Nazarbayev's September 27-29 visit to the United States was basically uncritical and emphasized that Kazakhstan, as the most stable and economically prosperous nation in Central Asia, was a worthy strategic partner for the U.S. Many analysts commented that the visit would push the relationship to "a new level" of mutual trust and cooperation. Most media accredited for the visit were pro-government or official. Progressive newspapers reprinted factual reports from accredited wire services and opposition papers mined criticism published in websites or Western publications for their assessments of the visit. Praise for Nazarbayev's leadership, particularly in nuclear disarmament, dominated the reporting. U.S. support for democratic reform was reported in the context of quotes from U.S. Government officials, including the joint statement and President Bush's remarks September 29. END SUMMARY.

No Criticism from Accredited Media

¶2. Almost all the dozen media accredited for Nazarbayev's visit were official or pro-government, with the exception of the independently owned Channel 31 and Interfax-Kazakhstan news agency. Some papers not accredited, like the progressive high circulation Vremya avoided commentary and instead reprinted factual reports from Interfax. Opposition papers mined Western news reports and online sources for their assessment of the visit. Reporting from accredited media was almost uniformly uncritical, laudatory, and included numerous quotes from American officials praising Nazarbayev and Kazakhstan.

15 Years of Bilateral Relations - Joint Achievement

¶3. Scene setters on the eve of the visit focused on the long term strategic partnership and the strong economic basis of relations. A lengthy report in the official Kazakh language daily Yegemen Kazakhstan September 27 headlined "Hello America! How Are You, Great Country?" praised both countries for building mutual trust over a 15-year relationship and for becoming "strategic partners with mutual interests," particularly in oil and gas trade. Pro-government Liter September 26 commented, "Kazakhstan is one of the few countries with great potential to further develop its energy resources. The U.S. now views Kazakhstan as a prospective, strategic partner in Central Asia, a significant region in the

international security system."

New Level of Cooperation and Trust

¶4. The September 30 headline in Yegemen Kazakhstan - "Collaboration To Reach New Level After President's U.S. Visit" - was echoed by many analysts before and after the visit. In discussing the possibility of a trans-Caspian gas pipeline, Johns Hopkins' Central Asia expert Fred Starr said such an agreement could provide "a new impetus to long term cooperation, not only in energy, but other areas as well" (official Khabar TV, September 26). Commentary in Liter cited "the consistency and effectiveness of projects already implemented by Kazakhstan" as "the basis for the transition of Kazakhstani-American relations to a new level." Analyst Murat Laumulin of the Kazakhstani Institute for Strategic Studies commented in Liter October 5 that the visit had indeed "elevated relations with the U.S. to a new level of trust and mutual understanding," while noting "the burdens of bilateral relations" were "attempts by the U.S. to constantly push for democratization, human rights, media freedom and NGO development." He held up Kazakhstan as "a moderate, secular, and pro-Western" role model not only for Central Asia, but for all Muslim countries.

Nazarbayev Praised as Nonproliferation Leader

¶5. Pro-government and official media highlighted Nazarbayev's successful leadership, particularly in non-proliferation efforts. The pro-government municipal station Almaty TV on September 27 quoted Kazakhstani diplomats in Washington commenting that Nazarbayev's warm reception by President George H. W. Bush in Kennebunkport was "a sign of respect" for Nazarbayev personally and that Nazarbayev's visit "was more about the future than the past." Five television stations and several newspapers reported on Congressman Tom Lantos' resolution congratulating Nazarbayev on the 15th anniversary of closing the Semipalatinsk testing ground and on

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Congresswoman Eni Faleomavaega's comment that he deserved the Nobel Prize for his contributions to world peace.

Democratic Reform Not in Headlines, but Not Ignored

¶6. While democratic reform did not make headlines, it was nevertheless included in comments reported from U.S. government officials. The official Russian language daily Kazakhstanskaya Pravda and Yegemen Kazakhstan printed the full text of the September 29 joint statement. (Note: full coverage in official media of statements by U.S. officials on support for democratic reform is not a given. Khabar removed comments on democracy from Assistant Secretary Boucher's September 10 interview.) Primetime scene

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setters reported the visit agenda as laid in the September 12 White House announcement of the visit - democracy promotion, the war on terror, energy diversification. On the day of the visit September 29, official broadcasters quoted President Bush thanking President Nazarbayev for "his contribution to helping a new democracy in Iraq," and for "his concerns about democracy in Afghanistan." Independent Channel 31 provided a fuller account of President Bush's comments including the two sides' discussion of "our commitment to institutions that will enable liberty to flourish."

¶7. President Nazarbayev's emphasis on security in his September 29 remarks was clearly reported in the weekend broadcast news on highest rated tabloid KTK TV, official Khabar and Channel 31. (Note: because of time zones, coverage of the September 29 meeting only started appearing the next day in Kazakhstan). KTK commented that Kazakhstan and the U.S. were long term strategic partners and therefore the heads of state had to discuss a wide range of economic, political and security issues, the last of which drew the president's "special attention."

Opposition Media Mine Internet for Dissenting Views

18. Opposition weekly Taszhargan on October 5 incorporated criticism from the October 4 "Voice of Democracy" electronic newsletter disseminated by the International Eurasia Institute website, believed to be affiliated with Nazarbayev's rival from the 1999 presidential elections, Akezhan Kazhegeldin. The article cited a quote from Senator Russ Feingold: "'Many know Nazarbayev as a corrupt dictator and as a person who does not respect the law, who trampled a rising democracy and wiped out free press. This is not a leader who should be accepted in the White House on an official visit.'" It also mentioned Senator Carl Levin's September 26 floor testimony challenging President Bush to prosecute the president of Kazakhstan as a "kleptocrat." The Voice of Democracy newsletter commented that Nazarbayev failed to achieve his number one priority, endorsement for Kazakhstan's chairmanship of the OSCE in 2009.

19. Opposition Respublika published comment October 20 from political scientist Nikolai Kuzmin on the lack of critical analysis in media coverage of the visit, and characterizing the visit as a publicity tour. "There was no information about this visit in the media. . . . A high level visit should be like a national foreign policy event aimed at protecting our national interests. . . . This visit was a one-man triumph for the head of state."

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